

# Facilitators and barriers of employment among transition-age Hispanic youth with disabilities

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## Abstract.

**BACKGROUND:** Prior research has examined the associations between demographic variables and employment outcomes in transition-age youth with disabilities, yet little is known about the supports and services that provide pathways to employment among transition-age Hispanic youth with disabilities.

**OBJECTIVE:** The purpose of the study was to identify variables associated with employment for transition-age Hispanic youth VR participants. Among them, demographic factors, barriers to employment, services associated with exiting in competitive integrated employment and associated weekly earnings.

**METHODS:** We used descriptive analysis to examine the demographic characteristics of the study's sample. Variables were then dichotomized, except for age at application, to be analyzed via logistic regression and a stepwise forward regression analysis was performed to assess the association between different levels of independent variables and selected dependent variables.

**RESULTS:** Findings were consistent with previous findings examining the relationships between sociodemographic variables, vocational rehabilitation (VR) related variables, and employment outcomes in transition-age youth with disabilities. Our findings revealed that there are several positive and negative sociodemographic and VR-related variables associated with employment and weekly earnings for transition-age Hispanic youth VR participants.

**CONCLUSION:** Besides supporting transition-age Hispanic youth with disabilities, understanding familial perspectives and needs would also be critical in facilitating a successful employment experience.

Keywords: Transition-age youth, Hispanic, employment outcomes, disabilities, vocational rehabilitation

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## 1. Introduction

Effective transition programming requires preparing youth with disabilities to participate in the workforce, however, there is still a need to increase access and participation of career development experiences and career and vocational programs for youths with disabilities while in high school (Carter et al., 2010). Youth with disabilities not only face physical and emotional changes, but also have limited work experience, which highlights the need for supporting these individuals during school-to-work transition (Langi et al., 2017). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2021 youth with disabilities aged 16 to 19 had an unemployment rate of 21.1% compared to 11.4% for their counterparts without disabilities. Additionally, the unemployment rate was 16.5% for youth with disabilities aged 20 to 24 compared to 8.7% for their peers without disabilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). These data suggests disparities in employment outcomes between youth with and without disabilities.

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) helps people with disabilities, including youth with disabilities, achieve or maintain employment through an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), and facilitates a successful transition from school to competitive integrated employment for students with disabilities (Jun et al., 2015). The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) emphasizes improving service provision and outcomes for transition-age youth (Honeycutt et al., 2017) as well as ongoing national efforts in enhancing effective transition services and post-school outcomes, (Poppen et al., 2017), therefore, it is important to continue exploring factors that can promote positive employment outcomes and enhance VR service quality in this population.

Prior research has examined the associations between demographic variables and employment outcomes in transition-age youth with disabilities. For example, in a recent study, being a female and a youth with a mental illnesses were found to be associated with poorer employment outcomes in transition-age youth with disabilities (Awsumb et al., 2020). In a study examining transition-age youth with disabilities who received VR services from 2003 to 2013, researchers found that young women with disabilities, young adults with a mental illness, multiple disabilities, or traumatic brain injury were less likely to enter the workforce (Poppen et al., 2017). Specific to various disability groups, higher levels of education and being a non-recipient of social security

benefits were found to predict positive employment outcomes among transition-age youth with traumatic brain injuries (Rumrill et al., 2016) and transition-age youth with autism spectrum disorder (ASD; Kaya et al., 2016). Similarly, high school graduation and post-secondary education and public support (e.g., Social Security Disability Insurance [SSDI], Supplemental Security Income [SSI], or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF]) were associated with successful employment outcomes among transition-age youth with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD; Glynn & Schaller, 2017). Among transition-age youth with visual impairment and blindness, being a male between the ages of 23 and 25, and not receiving social security disability benefits was associated with higher likelihood of employment (Cimera et al., 2015). Furthermore, transition-age youths with disabilities who participated in school transition programs and VR services demonstrated positive employment outcomes on work hours and salary (Jun et al., 2015).

In terms of VR services for transition-age youth with disabilities, growing research has examined the associations between VR service variables and employment outcomes in various types of disability groups. Transition-age youth with disabilities who received job placement services, job readiness training, and job search assistance had an increased likelihood of employment (Awsumb et al., 2020). Specific to different disability types, occupational/vocational training, job search, job placement, on-the-job support, maintenance, and information/referral were associated with competitive employment outcomes in transition-age youth with traumatic brain injuries (Rumrill et al., 2016). For transition-age youth with visual impairments and blindness, receiving on-the-job support, job placement, job developments, and assistive technology were associated with successful employment (Cimera et al., 2015). Among transition-age youth with ASD, Kaya et al. (2016) found that on-the-job support, job placement services, rehabilitation technology, occupational/vocational training, other services, job search assistance, vocational counseling and guidance, and job readiness training were associated with competitive employment. Additionally, college training, on-the-job training, job search assistance, and job placement were associated with successful employment outcomes among transition-age youth with ADHD (Glynn & Schaller, 2017).

Since Hispanic individuals with disabilities may face unique challenges in employment with their

dual-minority status, acculturation patterns, and environmental and social experiences (Quiñones-Mayo et al., 2000; Velcoff et al., 2010), growing research has examined employment outcomes between Hispanic and non-Hispanic individuals with disabilities. Previous research has also examined racial/ethnic differences in employment outcomes among transition-age youth with disabilities but has demonstrated inconsistent findings. For instance, it was reported that transition-age Hispanic youth with disabilities (35.0%) had a lower employment rate compared to White youth (40.4%) or youth of other racial/ethnic groups (40.4%; Sima et al., 2015). Similarly, Hispanic participants were less likely to achieve competitive employment than White participants in transition-aged youth with ASD (Kaya et al., 2016). In contrary, transition-age Hispanic youth with disabilities had better employment outcomes than non-Hispanic transition-age youths with disabilities due to family involvement and support during the rehabilitation process (Awsumb et al., 2020). Among those with visual impairments and blindness, transition-age Hispanic youth were more likely to achieve competitive employment compared to transition-age White youth (Cimera et al., 2015). For transition-age youth with ADHD, Hispanic clients were 1.4 times more likely to achieve successful employment than White clients, but Hispanic clients between the ages of 16–19 earned less than White clients (Glynn & Schaller, 2017).

### 1.1. Purpose of the study

Growing research has examined various factors associated with employment outcomes in transition-age youth with disabilities. To our knowledge, there is limited research on the supports and services that provide pathways to employment among transition-age Hispanic individuals with disabilities. The purpose of the study was to identify variables associated with employment for transition-age Hispanic youth VR participants. The research questions included the following:

1. What demographic factors, barriers to employment, and services are associated with exiting in competitive integrated employment after receiving services under an IPE of transition-age Hispanic VR participants?
2. What demographic factors, barriers to employment, and services are associated weekly earnings of transition-age Hispanic VR par-

ticipants who exited in competitive integrated employment after receiving services under an IPE?

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants and data source

Data for this study was collected via the Rehabilitation Services Administration's Case Report (RSA-911) database over a 48-month period (Fiscal year [FY] 2017- FY 2020). Considering the utilization of archival data (i.e., RSA-911 database), this study was exempted from getting approval from the Institutional Review Board. The inclusion criteria for the sample consisted of three components: (1) identified as Hispanic; (2) were between the ages of 14 and 25; and (3) exited the system between July 1, 2017, and June 30, 2020. After implementing the above criteria, a total of 52,048 individuals were identified. It is important to note that the sample size for each of the previously mentioned research questions varied. For research question one, the above three criteria were applied, and the sample size was 52,048. Given the nature of research question two, one additional criterion was applied: individuals who exited vocational rehabilitation services with competitive integrated employment. The sample for research question 2 was 17,762.

### 2.2. Variables

This present study was comprised of five levels of independent variables (demographic factors, disability category (i.e., physical, mental, cognitive) and public supports received (i.e., Supplemental Security Income), barriers to employment, pre-employment transition services, and vocational rehabilitation services) and two dependent variables (employment outcome at exit and weekly earnings for those employed at exit).

#### 2.2.1. Independent variables

Demographic factors in our study consisted of race/ethnicity, sex, and age at application. Under the disability category and public supports received, the following variables consisted of mental health disability, sensory and communication disability, physical disability, disability significance (signifi-

cant, most significant), Medicare coverage at time of application, Medicaid coverage at time of application, recipient of SSI, and recipient of SSDI. Barriers to employment were comprised of low income status, single parent status, identify as homeless runaway, foster care youth, ex-offender status, English learner, migrant and seasonal farmworker or their dependents, cultural barriers, deficiency in basic skills, expended TANF resources, long-term unemployment, displaced homemaker, and dislocated worker. Pre-employment transition services included counseling on enrollment opportunities, instruction in self-advocacy, job exploration counseling, work based learning experiences, and work readiness training. Lastly, 35 vocational rehabilitation services were selected for evaluation in this study (see Table 1).

#### 2.2.2. *Dependent variables*

The dependent variable for research question one was VR exit type, whereas the dependent variable for research question two was weekly earnings. For the dependent variable of VR exit type, we focused on those individuals that were served under an IPE and exited either in competitive integrated employment or not employed (RSA data element 356). The weekly earnings variable was calculated by combining the hours per week at exit (RSA data element 360) and hourly wage at exit (RSA data element 359). For more details about the listed RSA data element's please refer to Rehabilitation Services Administration (2019) reporting manual.

#### 2.3. *Data analysis*

A descriptive analysis was conducted to examine the demographic characteristics of the study's sample. A logistic regression was conducted to explore the relationship between the five levels of independent variables and exit at employment. Statistical analyses were conducted utilizing Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) 28.0. All variables, except age, were dichotomized to be analyzed via logistic regression. A stepwise forward regression analysis was performed to assess the association between the five levels of independent variables and weekly earnings of the selected sample. Variables with a utilization rate of less than 1% by the sample were dropped in the logistic and stepwise regression analysis.

### 3. Results

Description of the findings for the logistic regression and stepwise regression analyses are presented first. Considering the design of this study, two descriptive analyses were conducted for each research question: transition-age Hispanic youth who have exited vocational rehabilitation services (research question 1), and transition-age Hispanic youth who have exited in employment (research question 2). Descriptive data of the characteristics for each of the samples is discussed in the findings of each corresponding research question. Tables 2 and 3 present the statistical findings of positive and negative predictors of employment at exit. Finally, Table 4 describes the predictors of weekly earnings based on our stepwise regression model.

#### 3.1. *Predictors of employment outcomes at exit*

A total of 52,051 transition-age Hispanic youth who have exited vocational rehabilitation services were identified. The sample was comprised of 60.6% males, 39.1% females, and a mean age of 23 years old ( $SD = 1.614$ ). In terms of race, majority of the sample identified as White (87%), followed by Black or African American (7%), American Indian (3.1%), Hispanic only (1.3%), Asian (1%), and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (0.8%). In the present study, the group of "Hispanic only" represents individuals who did not identify with any of the other listed racial groups (e.g., White, Black or African American). In terms of disability category, a majority had a mental health disability (86.7%), followed by sensory and communication disability (8%), and physical disability (4.9%).

A logistic regression analysis was conducted to explore the significance of demographic factors, disability category and public supports received, barriers, pre-employment transition services, and vocational rehabilitation services related with transition-age Hispanic youth exiting vocational rehabilitation services with employment. The model explained 6% of the variance (Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.058$ ) and several positive and negative predictors of employment at exit were identified (see Tables 2 and 3).

The most significant positive predictor of employment at exit was short-term job supports ( $OR = 4.13$ ; 95% Confidence Interval [CI] [3.59, 4.74]) followed by age at application ( $OR = 1.12$ ; 95% CI [1.10, 1.14]) and maintenance ( $OR = 2.44$ ; 95% CI [2.19, 2.73]).

Table 1  
Description of vocational rehabilitation services

Service	Description of service
Assessment	Services provided and activities performed to determine individual's eligibility for VR services, to assign a priority category of a VR program that operates under an order of selection, and/or to determine the nature and scope of VR services to be included in IPE. Trial work experiences are also classified under this service.
Benefits counseling	Assistance provided to individuals interested in getting a job, but are uncertain of the impact work income may have on any disability benefits and entitlements being received, and/or are not aware of benefits (e.g., access to healthcare) that might be available to support employment efforts
Basic academic remedial or literacy training	Literacy training or training focused on remediating basic academic skills that are needed to function on the job in the competitive labor market.
Customized employment services	Services designed to meet the specific abilities of the individual with a significant disability and the business needs of the employer. Services is carried out through flexible strategies such as job exploration.
Counseling on enrollment opportunities	Provision of information and guidance on various post-secondary education and training opportunities (e.g., career options, postsecondary opportunities related to career of interest, aid in completing college application, etc.).
Customized training	A training program designed to meet the special requirements of an employer who has entered into an agreement with a service delivery area to hire individuals who are trained to the employer's specifications.
Diagnosis and treatment of impairments	Corrective surgery or therapeutic treatment, diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders, dentistry, nursing services, necessary hospitalization, drugs and supplies, prosthetics, eyeglasses, podiatry, physical therapy, occupation therapy, speech or hearing therapy, mental health services, treatment of acute or chronic medical complications, other medical or medically related rehabilitation services.
Disability related skills training	Disability-related augmentative skills training that includes, but is not limited to, orientation and mobility; rehabilitation teaching; training in the use of low vision aids; braille; speech reading; sign language; and cognitive training/retraining.
Extended services	Ongoing support services and other appropriate services that are needed to support and maintain a youth with a most significant disability.
Four-year college or university training	Any part- or full-time academic training resulting in a Baccalaureate degree, a certificate, or other recognized less than postgraduate educational credential. Training can be provided by either a four-year college or university or technical college.
Graduate college, or university	Any part- or full-time academic training resulting in a degree recognized as beyond a Baccalaureate Degree, such as Master of Science, Arts, or Doctor of Philosophy.
Interpreter services	Sign language or oral interpretation services for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and tactile interpretation services for individuals who are deaf-blind.
Information and referral services	Service provided to individuals who need services from other agencies.
Instruction in self-advocacy	Training/experiences aimed at enhancing individual's self-advocacy skills through the development of knowledge of self, knowledge of rights and responsibilities, communication skills and leadership skills. Examples of this service include helping individual identify and document needed accommodations, supporting individuals in goal setting, and providing opportunities for mentoring and leadership activities.
Junior or community college training	Any part- or full-time academic training above the secondary school level leading to an associate degree, a certificate, or other recognized educational credential. Training can be provided by either a community college, junior college, or technical college.
Job exploration counseling	Provision of various opportunities to learn about careers, skills needed for different jobs, and discover personal career interests (e.g., administration of vocational interest inventories, interviewing people to learn about their job and skills needed).
Job placement assistance	Referral to a specific job resulting in an interview, regardless of whether or not the individual obtained the job.

(Continued)

Table 1  
(Continued)

Service	Description of service
Job readiness training	Training provided to prepare individuals for work (e.g., interpersonal communication skills, work behaviors, increasing productivity, etc.).
Job search assistance	Service includes job search activities to support and assist an individual in searching for an appropriate job. Examples of service include support in resume preparation, identifying appropriate job opportunities, developing interview skills, and making contacts with companies on behalf of the consumer.
Maintenance	Service provides monetary support for living expenses such as food, shelter and clothing that are in excess of the normal expenses of the individual.
Miscellaneous training	Any training that was not included in any of the other categories, such as GED or secondary school training that led to a diploma, or courses taken at community, junior, or four-year colleges that did not lead to a certificate or diploma.
On the job training	Training in specific job skills by a prospective employer, whereby trainee typically gets paid.
Other services	This category of service is utilized when the service provided to an individual does not meet the criteria of the other listed services. Examples of this service include provision of funds for occupational licenses, tools and equipment, initial stocks and supplies.
Occupation or vocational training	Training provided by a community college and/or business, vocational/trade or technical school to prepare students for gainful employment in a recognized occupation, not leading to an academic degree.
Personal assistance services	Service aims to support individuals with a disability perform activities of daily living, increase control in life and the ability to perform routine tasks, provided in conjunction with other VR services, and are necessary for achieving an employment outcome.
Registered apprenticeship training	Work based employment and training program that combines hands-on and on-the-job work experience in a skilled occupation with related classroom instruction. Usually structured apprenticeship programs have minimum requirements for the duration of on-the-job work experience, classroom instruction, and provide a recognized certificate of completion.
Reader services	Services for individuals who cannot read print due to blindness. Examples of this service include reading aloud, transcription of printed information into braille, or sound recordings if the individual requests such transcription.
Rehabilitation technology	Service includes systematic application of technologies, engineering methodologies, or scientific principles to meet the needs of, and address the barriers confronted by, individuals with disabilities.
Supported employment services	Ongoing support services, including customized employment, and other appropriate services needed to support an individual with a most significant disability in maintaining supported employment.
Short-term job supports	Support services provided to an individual who has been placed in employment in order to stabilize the placement and enhance job retention.
Technical assistance services	Consultation and other services provided to conduct market analyses, develop business plans, and provide resources to individuals in the pursuit of self-employment, telecommuting and small business operation outcomes.
Transportation	Service covers travel and related expenses that are essential to support applicant or eligible individual to participate in a VR service. This includes expenses for training in the use of public transportation vehicles and systems.
Vocational rehabilitation counseling and guidance	Service includes information and support services to assist an individual in exercising informed choice.
Work based learning experience	Educational approach or instructional methodology that utilizes workplace or real work with the aim of providing individual with the knowledge and skills that will aid in linking school experiences to real life work activities and future career opportunities. Examples of this service include job shadowing, internships (paid and non-paid), service learning, volunteering, among others.
Workplace readiness training	Involves learning about skills and behaviors that are essential for any job (e.g., how to interact with supervisor, understanding expectations of employer, developing transportation plans, financial literacy, etc.).

Description of services as described in the RSA 911 code book and WINTAC's CRP Pre-ETS Guidebook. *Note.* VR=vocational rehabilitation. GED=general educational development. IPE=individualized plan for employment. WINTAC= Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center.

Table 2  
Positive predictors of competitive integrated employment at exit

Predictor	B	SE	Wald	df	p	Exp(B)	95% CI	
							LL	UL
Demographics								
Male	0.21	0.02	116.71	1	<0.001***	1.24	1.19	1.28
Age at application	0.11	0.01	268.69	1	<0.001***	1.12	1.10	1.14
Disability category and public supports received								
Mental health	0.07	0.04	3.99	1	0.046*	1.08	1.00	1.15
Barriers								
Displaced homemaker	0.23	0.09	6.17	1	0.013*	1.26	1.05	1.50
English learner	0.06	0.03	3.87	1	0.049*	1.06	1.00	1.12
Expended Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	0.25	0.05	24.78	1	<0.001***	1.29	1.17	1.42
Migrant and seasonal farmworker or their dependent	0.30	0.09	10.44	1	0.001***	1.35	1.13	1.62
Pre-employment Transition Services								
Work based learning experience	0.36	0.13	7.31	1	0.007**	1.43	1.10	1.85
Vocational Rehabilitation Services								
Information and referral services	0.23	0.07	11.63	1	<0.001***	1.26	1.10	1.43
Instruction in self-advocacy	0.54	0.22	6.42	1	0.011*	1.72	1.13	2.63
Job placement assistance	0.62	0.06	110.94	1	<0.001***	1.85	1.65	2.07
Job search assistance	0.67	0.09	54.66	1	<0.001***	1.95	1.63	2.33
Maintenance	0.89	0.06	248.06	1	<0.001***	2.44	2.19	2.73
Short-term job supports	1.42	0.07	400.01	1	<0.001***	4.13	3.59	4.74
Transportation	0.25	0.05	30.23	1	<0.001***	1.28	1.17	1.40

Note. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. \* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Table 3  
Negative predictors of competitive integrated employment at exit

Predictor	B	SE	Wald	df	p	Exp(B)	95% CI	
							LL	UL
Disability category and public supports received								
Disability significance	-0.05	0.02	7.44	1	0.006**	0.95	0.91	0.99
Medicaid	-0.06	0.02	9.81	1	0.002**	0.94	0.90	0.98
Medicare	-0.20	0.05	15.31	1	<0.001***	0.82	0.75	0.91
Supplemental Security Income recipient	-0.34	0.03	119.47	1	<0.001***	0.71	0.67	0.76
Barriers								
Ex-offender status	-0.26	0.07	12.06	1	<0.001***	0.77	0.67	0.89
Foster care youth	-0.19	0.07	7.06	1	0.008**	0.83	0.72	0.95
Long-term unemployment	-0.16	0.02	61.33	1	<0.001***	0.85	0.82	0.89
Vocational Rehabilitation Services								
Assessment	-0.32	0.06	33.72	1	<0.001***	0.72	0.65	0.81
Job exploration counseling	-0.50	0.16	9.36	1	0.002**	0.61	0.44	0.84
Job readiness training	-0.17	0.06	8.75	1	0.003**	0.84	0.75	0.94
Vocational rehabilitation counseling and guidance	-0.24	0.04	30.98	1	<0.001***	0.79	0.72	0.86

Note. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. \* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Other positive predictors included the following: males ( $OR = 1.24$ ; 95% CI [1.19, 1.28]), mental health disability ( $OR = 1.08$ ; 95% CI [1.00, 1.15]), displaced homemaker ( $OR = 1.26$ ; 95% CI [1.05, 1.50]), English learner ( $OR = 1.06$ ; 95% CI [1.00, 1.12]), expended TANF resources ( $OR = 1.29$ ; 95% CI [1.17, 1.42]), migrant and seasonal farmworker ( $OR = 1.35$ ; 95% CI [1.13, 1.62]), pre-employment transition services work base learning experience ( $OR = 1.43$ ; 95% CI [1.10, 1.85]), information and referral services ( $OR = 1.26$ ; 95% CI [1.10, 1.43]), instruction in self-advocacy ( $OR = 1.72$ ; 95% CI [1.13, 2.63]), job placement assistance ( $OR = 1.85$ ; 95% CI [1.65,

2.07]), job search assistance ( $OR = 1.95$ ; 95% CI [1.63, 2.33]), short-term job supports ( $OR = 4.13$ ; 95% CI [3.59, 4.74]), and transportation ( $OR = 1.28$ ; 95% CI [1.17, 1.40]).

As for negative predictors, the most significant predictor of employment at exit was being a recipient of SSI ( $OR = 0.71$ ; 95% CI [0.67, 0.76]), followed by long-term unemployment ( $OR = 0.85$ ; 95% CI [0.82, 0.89]), and assessment ( $OR = 0.72$ ; 95% CI [0.65, 0.81]). Additional negative predictors that were identified included the following: disability significance ( $OR = 0.95$ ; 95% CI [0.91, 0.99]), Medicaid recipient ( $OR = 0.94$ ; 95% CI [0.90, 0.98]), Medicare recip-

Table 4  
Final model for the stepwise regression analysis

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
<b>Demographics</b>				
Male	39.84	3.08	0.10	12.96***
White	-14.72	4.90	-0.02	-3.01**
<b>Disability category and public supports received</b>				
Sensory and communication disability	24.22	5.68	0.03	4.26***
Disability significance	-32.15	3.13	-0.08	-10.28***
Supplemental Security Income recipient	-69.11	4.97	-0.11	-13.90***
Social Security Disability Insurance recipient	-46.59	12.08	-0.03	-3.86***
<b>Barriers</b>				
Basic skills deficient	-19.58	3.33	-0.05	-5.87***
Ex-offender status	33.15	11.63	0.02	2.85**
Expended Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	-16.23	7.60	-0.02	-2.14*
Long-term unemployment	-11.16	3.17	-0.03	-3.52***
Low income	8.68	3.28	0.02	2.64**
<b>Pre-ETS</b>				
Work based learning experience	-48.94	20.99	-0.05	-2.33*
Workplace readiness training	-62.69	27.00	-0.08	-2.32*
<b>VR Services</b>				
Assessment	-22.23	8.27	-0.02	-2.69**
Information and referral services	-34.42	9.97	-0.04	-3.45***
Job placement assistance	-27.27	7.31	-0.03	-3.73***
Job readiness training	-22.08	8.48	-0.02	-2.60**
Job search assistance	57.42	12.15	0.04	4.73***
Other services	26.73	10.25	0.02	2.61**
Supported Employment Services	-55.47	11.71	-0.04	-4.74***
Short-term job supports	-34.20	7.59	-0.04	-4.50***
Workplace readiness training	67.72	28.77	0.08	2.35*

\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

ient ( $OR = 0.82$ ; 95% CI [0.75, 0.91]), ex-offender status ( $OR = 0.77$ ; 95% CI [0.67, 0.89]), foster care youth ( $OR = 0.83$ ; 95% CI [0.72, 0.95]), job exploration counseling ( $OR = 0.61$ ; 95% CI [0.44, 0.84]), job readiness training ( $OR = 0.84$ ; 95% CI [0.75, 0.94]), and vocational rehabilitation counseling and guidance ( $OR = 0.79$ ; 95% CI [0.72, 0.86]).

### 3.2. Predictors of weekly earnings at exit

A total of 17,762 transition-age Hispanic youth who exited in competitive integrated employment were identified. The sample was comprised of 63.6% males, 36.2% females, and a mean age of 23 years old ( $SD = 1.522$ ). Race/ethnicity for this sample consisted of majority identifying as White (89%), followed by Black or African American (5.2%), American Indian (2.7%), Asian (1%), Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (0.8%), and Hispanic only (0.8%). In terms of disability category, a majority had a mental health disability (88.4%), followed by a sensory and communication disability (7.5%) and a physical disability (4.1%).

A stepwise regression analysis was conducted to identify predictors of weekly earnings at exit by

examining its association with the selected five levels of independent variables (demographic factors, disability category and public supports received, barriers, pre-employment transition services, and vocational rehabilitation services) as it relates to transition-age Hispanic youth who have exited in employment. The last model (i.e., model 5) demonstrated that the selected variables explained 5.1% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.051$ ). Coefficients of analyses demonstrated several variables were significantly associated with weekly earnings.

Model 1 included all demographic variables and explained 0.06% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.006$ ) indicating that such variables had no significant effect on weekly earnings. Model 2 included all demographic and disability categories and public supports received variables, resulting in 3.4% of the variance explained ( $R^2 = 0.034$ ). Although the variance is still small, there was a small increase indicating that disability category and public supports play a role in weekly earnings. Model 3 consisted of demographic, disability category and public supports received, and barrier variables; resulting in 3.9% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.039$ ) being accounted for. Model 4 encompassed demographic, disability cat-



egory and public supports received, barriers, and pre-employment transition services variables. Model 4 explained 4.2% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.042$ ). Lastly, as previously mentioned model 5 explained 5.1% of the variance,  $R^2 = 0.051$ ,  $F(46, 17570) = 21.498$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

Findings of model 5 identified the following positive predictors of weekly earnings at exit: workplace readiness training ( $\beta = 0.08$ ,  $p < 0.5$ ), followed by job search assistance ( $\beta = 0.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), males ( $\beta = 0.10$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), ex-offender status ( $\beta = 0.02$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), other services ( $\beta = 0.02$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), sensory and communication disability ( $\beta = 0.03$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and low income status ( $\beta = 0.02$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Negative predictors of weekly earnings at exit identified in the model included the following: SSI recipient ( $\beta = -0.11$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), pre-employment transition services workplace readiness training ( $\beta = -0.08$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), supported employment services ( $\beta = -0.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), pre-employment transition services work based learning experience ( $\beta = 48.94$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), SSDI recipient ( $\beta = -0.03$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), information and referral services ( $\beta = -0.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), short-term job supports ( $\beta = -0.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), disability significance ( $\beta = -0.08$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), job placement assistance ( $\beta = -0.03$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), assessment ( $\beta = -0.02$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), job readiness training ( $\beta = -0.02$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), basic skills deficient ( $\beta = -0.05$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), expended TANF resources ( $\beta = -16.23$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), White ( $\beta = -0.02$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and long-term unemployment ( $\beta = -0.03$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

#### 4. Discussion

Although growing research has explored factors associated with employment outcomes in transition-age youth with disabilities, there is limited research on the supports and services that provide pathways to employment among transition-age Hispanic youths with disabilities. This study examined to what extent sociodemographic and VR-related variables were associated with employment for transition-age Hispanic youth VR participants. Our study revealed both positive and negative predictors of employment for transition-age Hispanic youth VR participants.

##### 4.1. Sociodemographic predictors

Our findings revealed that there are positive sociodemographic and VR-related variables associ-

ated with employment for transition-age Hispanic youth VR participants. Specifically, sociodemographic variables such as sex (males), age at application, disability category (mental health disability), language status (English learners), and barriers (displaced homemaker, expended TANF, migrant and seasonal farmworker or dependent) were all positive predictors of employment at exit in Hispanic VR participants. Similarly, various sociodemographic variables were positively associated with weekly earnings. Specifically, sex (males), disability category (sensory and communication disability), and criminal background (ex-offender) were all positive predictors of weekly earnings. Our study also revealed that various sociodemographic variables were negatively associated with employment at exit. Sociodemographic characteristics such as insurance status (Medicaid, Medicare, SSI recipient), criminal status (ex-offender status), and unemployment status (long-term unemployment) were all negatively associated with employment at exit. Similarly, we found sociodemographic variables such as race (White), disability significance, insurance status (SSI recipient, SSDI recipient), low literacy skills (basic skills deficient), and unemployment status (long-term unemployment) were all negatively related to weekly earnings.

Our findings are somewhat consistent with previous findings examined the relationships between sociodemographic variables and employment outcomes in transition-age youth with disabilities. Awsumb and colleagues (2020) found that gender (female) and mental health status (presence of mental illnesses) negatively associated with employment outcomes in youth with disabilities. Poppen et al. (2017) reported that presence of mental illness, multiple disabilities, and TBI were all negatively associated with employment in youth with disabilities. Rumrill and colleagues (2016) examined the relationships between education, social security, and employment and found that higher levels of education and nonreceipt of social security benefits were found to predict positive employment outcomes among transition-age youth with TBI. Similar findings are found in transition-age youth with ASD (Kaya et al., 2016). Glynn and Schaller (2017) found that high school graduation, postsecondary education, and public support (e.g., SSI, SSDI, or TANF) were related to positive employment outcomes in transition-age youth with ADHD. Finally, Jun and colleagues (2015) found that youth with disabilities who participated in school transition programs and

VR services demonstrated successful employment outcomes on work hours and salary.

Additionally, there are some potential explanations as to some of the identified sociodemographic predictors of employment and weekly earnings such as sex differences, age at application, and receiving SSI. For instance, males having a greater likelihood of exiting with employment could be a result of traditional gender roles where young men typically are given more independence than young women. In Awsumb and colleagues (2020) study, a provider that was interviewed shared how schools and programs do not always offer the same opportunities to girls as they do to boys who are in high school thus potentially contributing to the sex differences observed in employment outcomes. Moreover, developmental factors can contribute to age at application being a positive predictor of employment (i.e., older individuals had greater likelihood of obtaining employment). Considering the mindset of a 15 year old versus a 22 year old, an older youth may be more concerned about obtaining employment to become more financial independent and pursue other adulthood milestones (e.g., living independently), whereas a 15 year old may not be as concerned about those matters just yet. Lastly, youth receiving SSI may have worse employment outcomes as a result of experiencing concerns or misunderstanding about the conditions of SSI. For example, research has suggested some transition-age youth may decide not to seek employment due to fear of losing their benefits (Schlegelmilch et al., 2019).

#### 4.2. *Vocational Rehabilitation-Related predictors*

We also found that VR-related factors including pre-employment transition services work based learning experiences, information and referral services, instruction in self-advocacy, job placement assistance, job search assistance, maintenance, short-term job supports, and transportation were all positively associated with employment at exit. Similarly, various VR-related factors including job search assistance, other services, and workplace readiness training were all positively associated with weekly earnings. However, we found that assessment, job exploration counseling, job readiness training, and vocational rehabilitation counseling and guidance were all negatively associated with employment at exit. Similarly, various VR-related factors including pre-employment transition services work based learning experiences, pre-employment transi-

tion services work readiness training, assessment, information and referral services, job placement assistance, job readiness training, supported employment services, and short-term job supports were all negatively related to weekly earnings.

Research on transition-age Hispanic youth with disabilities and their employment outcomes is limited. However previous research has documented that VR services are effective in improving job outcomes for people with disabilities including transition-age youth with disabilities. Our findings also demonstrated that various VR services are positively associated with employment and weekly earning in transition-age Hispanic youth with disabilities, which is consistent with previous research. For example, Awsumb et al. (2020) found that job placement services, job readiness training, and job search assistance were positively associated with probability of employment in youth with disabilities. Additionally, Rumrill and colleagues (2016) found that occupational/vocational training, job search, job placement, on-the-job support, maintenance, and information/referral were associated with competitive employment outcomes in transition-age youth with traumatic brain injuries. Cimera et al. (2015) reported that receiving on-the-job support, job placement, job developments, and assistive technology were associated with successful employment in transition-age youth with visual impairment and blindness.

Among the VR-related predictors mentioned earlier, short-term job supports, maintenance, and assessment were observed to be the most significant predictors of employment. Considering short-term job supports (e.g., job coaching) and maintenance are both services that are provided to consumers that have a job, it is not surprising our results showed they were positive predictors of employment at exit. Assessment services involve services and activities that help determine transition-age youth's eligibility for services, the determination of category in order of selection, and/or determination of VR services included in individual's IPE (Rehabilitation Services Administration, 2019). Further examples of assessment services include vocational-related assessments such as work aptitudes and career interests that can help determine if transition-age youth would benefit from receiving VR services as well as help with establishing career-related goals. Moreover, provision of assessment services can delay transition-age youth's timeline to begin receiving services and completing the program (i.e., exit with employment). Hence,

explaining why assessment services could serve as a negative predictor of employment for transition-age Hispanic youth.

Lastly, when comparing the identified predictors of employment and weekly earnings, five variables were observed to remain constant. These included two positive predictors (males, job search assistance) and three negative predictors (SSI recipient, long-term unemployment, assessment). Contrary, three conflicting predictors were identified, with job placement assistance and information and referral service being a positive predictor for employment, yet a negative predictor of weekly earnings. Similarly, short-term job supports demonstrated to positively influence employment outcomes, yet it negatively impacts transition-age youths weekly earnings at exit.

### 4.3. *Implications*

The present study had various implications for rehabilitation professionals and practitioners. First, considering transition-age Hispanic youth receiving SSI had worse employment outcomes and weekly earnings, VR counselors should enhance their efforts in providing benefits counseling within the pre-employment transition services model. The literature has demonstrated that provision of benefits counseling result in a greater likelihood of work attempts and weekly earnings (Delin et al., 2012; Hartman et al., 2015, 2019; Kregel, 2012; Leahy et al. 2014; Schimmel et al., 2010; Schlegelmilch et al., 2019; Tremblay et al., 2004, 2006; Wilhelm & McCormick, 2013). Hence, an absence of benefits counseling will contribute to the negative impacts of receiving SSI transition-age Hispanic youth VR consumers experience, as reported by this study. However, despite benefits counseling being documented as a good support for transition-age youth with SSI, our data indicated that from the approximately 13.9% individuals receiving SSI only 0.8% received benefits counseling. Further indicating improvement of delivery of benefits counseling for this population to adequately support their employment outcomes.

Implementation of rapid engagement strategies and customized employment services should be highly considered for transition-age Hispanic youth with disabilities. Research has demonstrated that rapid engagement activities are associated with successful employment outcomes than compared to gradual approaches (Bond et al., 1995; Drake et al., 2012, as cited in Hartman et al., 2019). Moreover, rapid engagement strategies can help reduce

the long process for eligibility by, for example having youth do work trial (job shadowing) in two weeks rather than six months. Additionally, research has also demonstrated that customized employment services are positively associated with employment outcomes for people with disabilities, including those with more significant disabilities (Riesen et al., 2015; Rogers et al., 2008). Hence, incorporation of customized employment activities can enhance transition-age youth's discovery process that then strengthen their employment outcomes. Considering our findings demonstrated disability significance was a negative predictor of employment and weekly earnings; and only 0.1% of the study's sample received customized employment further suggest that transition-age Hispanic youth may benefit from receiving this service. However, as mentioned given the small percentage of transition-age Hispanic youth receiving customized employment services, is concerning given the multiple benefits such service has on the transition from school to work outcomes (Riesen et al., 2015; Rogers et al., 2008).

The observed mean age of participants in this study (23 years old) was surprising, considering the observed mean age in other studies examining transition-age youth with disabilities in VR program has ranged between 17 and 19 years old (e.g., Awsumb et al., 2016, 2020; Cimera et al., 2015; Kaya et al., 2016). The significant difference in mean age, suggests that transition-age Hispanic youth with disabilities are applying to vocational rehabilitation services later than compared to transition-age White youth. This is critical given in this study age at application was a significant predictor of competitive integrated employment at exit of VR program among transition-age Hispanic youth with disabilities. Moreover, considering it has been about six years since the establishment of the WIOA, this finding calls for state VR agencies to develop new strategies to improve their existing outreach efforts towards transition-age Hispanic youth with disabilities.

Furthermore, given transition-age Hispanic youths with disabilities face various physical and psychological challenges as they transition from school to the workforce, it is imperative for VR professionals to provide culturally responsive services to support these individuals. For instance, demonstrating cultural competency was identified as a key attribute for employment specialists working with transition-aged youth with disabilities (Tilson & Simonsen, 2013). These specialists highlighted the importance of working from a person-centered viewpoint to

understanding the complex issues youths with disabilities face and utilizing effective communication methods to connect with them and their families (Tilson & Simonsen, 2013). Transition-age Hispanic youth with disabilities indicated vocational supports that are important to them, including the importance of family and the need for bilingual staff and Spanish translators to support a successful integration (Torres Stone et al., 2015). Besides supporting transition-age Hispanic youth with disabilities, understanding familial perspectives and needs would also be critical in facilitating a successful employment experience. Research has suggested that Hispanic families may face difficulties in supporting their family members with disabilities in achieving positive post-school outcomes, such as needing more information about transitions plans, trusting their community members more than educators and service-providers, and encountering systemic barriers (Francis et al., 2018).

The role of VR counselors has been documented to play a key role in the transition planning process and successful postsecondary transition outcomes on youth with disabilities (Plotner et al., 2017). However, there remains challenges in the provision of services to transition-age youth with disabilities as well as interagency collaborative efforts (Awsumb et al., 2020; Plotner et al., 2017). For instance, although some VR counselors have identified feeling comfortable in serving transition-age youth in two domains (VR and guidance; and employment preparation and exploration), there are lacking in some areas in adequately serving transition-age youth with disabilities (Awsumb et al., 2020; Plotner et al., 2012). Additionally VR counselors have demonstrated having misconceptions about youth with disabilities and not understanding the purpose of serving youth with disabilities (Awsumb et al., 2020). As for interagency collaborations, VR counselors have demonstrated to lack knowledge on how to work with transition-age youth with disabilities in school districts as well as secondary education and best practices in providing age-appropriate employment services (Awsumb et al., 2020). Considering all of this information, training for current and future VR counselors working with transition-age youth with disabilities should incorporate a training session focused on serving transition-age youth with disabilities, and strategies to establish collaborations with other agencies as well as how to maintain them.

Lastly, considering Hispanic individuals with disabilities face unique challenges in employment due to their unique sociocultural characteristics (e.g.,

dual-minority status) (Quiñones-Mayo et al., 2000; Velcoff et al., 2010), more research on the relationship between sociodemographic characteristics, VR services, and employment are warranted. Future research should also opt for examination of data other than RSA-911, considering such dataset may lack specificity for the needs of this population to correctly understand employment outcomes. As observed in this study, a small variance was explained through the utilization of RSA-911 making it challenging to further comprehend the factors impacting the employment outcomes of transition-age Hispanic youth with disabilities. Hence, as mentioned, future research should breakout from RSA-911 and focus on specific constructs that have been associated with employment outcomes for people with disabilities, primarily transition-age youth with disabilities. For instance, the construct of self-determination has been suggested to be positively associated with employment outcomes among youth with disabilities (Burke et al., 2020; Shogren et al., 2015).

#### 4.4. *Limitations*

There were several limitations in the present study including usage of RSA-911 data as well as the utilization rate of services by the selected sample. Considering the RSA-911 dataset is generated by VR counselors, this may result in some errors in data input and coding despite the existent training and RSA-911 code book that provides all the guidelines. Hence, this not only impacts the data integrity but also impacts the sample size that we are able to examine. This is considering that in cases where there is missing data or errors in the way data was coded it may result in having to drop participants and not being able to adequately examine the selected population. For example, when looking at age at application, the descriptive analysis for the present study demonstrated that the sample's age at application ranged between 0 to 91 years old. This is problematic given that the youngest age one can apply to VR services is 14 years old, and the likelihood of one applying at a younger age than that is not existent. Additionally, considering the small variance that was explained in both the logistic regression and stepwise logistic regression models (6.0% and 5.1%, respectively), it underscored how the RSA-911 dataset provides limited information in terms of contextual data that may aid in better understanding several outcomes within state VR agencies (e.g., employment outcomes, weekly earnings) for the study's popu-

lation. Furthermore, our results indicated that there are other contextual factors, outside those reported in RSA-911, that explain further the overall predictors of employment outcomes and weekly earnings on transition-age Hispanic youth with disabilities (e.g., state policies, funding, community rehabilitation agencies' capacity to deliver services).

Another limitation includes the current implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) by state VR agencies during the selected time period (FY 2017 through FY 2020) which may have created uneven effects over the four-year period. The emergence of COVID-19 is another factor that could have impacted the delivery of state VR services which consequently impact transition-age youth's employment outcomes and weekly earnings. Additionally, considering the range of years we focused our data collection (2017–2020) critical immigration policies and political climate, specifically relating to Hispanic individuals, could have also impacted transition-age Hispanic youths' engagement in vocational rehabilitation services and employment. For example, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAMERS) Act may have had a greater impact among transition-age youth that either identifies or has a parent/guardian that is as an undocumented immigrant. DACA provides undocumented immigrants, who meet with the mandate criteria, with protection from deportation and the opportunity to legally work in the U.S., while the DREAMERS Act aims to provide a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants (Cabrera-Marquez, n.d.; National Immigration Law Center, 2022; U. S. Department of Homeland Security, 2017). Since the establishment of DACA in 2012 there has been ongoing discussion about the status of DACA and efforts towards the passing of the DREAMERS Act. The ongoing discussion about the future of DACA and the DREAMERS Act has led to a lot of uncertainty and anxiety for DACA recipients, primarily due to the fear of being deported, being separated from their loved ones, and not being able to fulfill the "American Dream" (Suarez-Orozco & Lopez-Hernandez, 2020). According to the American Immigration Counseling Organization, in the 2019 DACA national survey it was observed that respondents moved to a job with better pay (58%), better working conditions (48%), and with health insurance or other benefits (53%). Hence, showcasing the significant socioeconomic impact DACA has had on individuals in the program. In addition, polit-

ical climate towards Hispanic individuals during this range of years could have also impacted professionals views towards transition-age Hispanic youth which can have detrimental effects on rapport building between professionals, transition-age youth and their families (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010; Harry, 2008; Ijalba, 2016).

An additional limitation includes the utilization and provision rate of VR services by the study's sample which results in limiting the generalizability of the study's findings. During a descriptive analysis of the initial 35 VR services, 20 demonstrated to have a utilization rate less than 1% indicating that a very small portion of our sample were receiving such services (e.g., benefits counseling [0.2%], customized employment [0.1%], on-the-job training [0.4%], supported employment [0.7%], and four-year college or university training services [0.1%]). This is concerning given it further highlights and proves the underutilization of state VR services by transition-age Hispanic youth. Lastly, some of the identified predictors in this study demonstrated having a low utilization rate (i.e., less than 2%). These consisted of five barriers variables (short-term job supports [1.8%]; foster care youth [1.6%]; ex-offender status [1.5%]; displaced homemaker [1%]; and migrant and seasonal farmworker [0.8%]) and two VR services (job search assistance [1.1%] and maintenance [0.8%]).

## 5. Conclusion

This study aimed to identify the demographic, disability type and public supports, barriers, pre-employment transition services, and vocational rehabilitations services variables that predicted employment outcomes and weekly earnings of transition-age Hispanic youth. Although the logistic regression and stepwise logistic regression models explained a very small variance (6% and 5.1%, respectively), it is a step towards better understanding the overall factors impacting transition-age Hispanic youth employment outcomes and weekly earnings. Given the findings of this study, further research is needed to better understand the confounding factors that can influence this population's employment outcomes and weekly earnings. For instance, considering that RSA-911 provides limited information, future research should implement qualitative research methods to further comprehend the experiences of transition-age Hispanic youth as well as vocational

rehabilitation counselors serving this population. By better understanding their experiences, it may provide a holistic perspective as to the facilitators and barriers transition-age Hispanic youth encounter while seeking employment.

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### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

### Ethics statement

Permission was not required from the first author's institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB) given this study was a secondary data analysis and no interaction was done with human subjects.

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### Informed consent

No informed consent was utilized for this study.

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